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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: MEDIA RESPONSE AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY
EFFORTS ON U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: A. SECSTATE 30480

[¶](#)B. SECSTATE 26910

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. Slovenian media coverage of U.S. missile defense plans in Poland and Czech Republic has been generally restrained, with numerous straightforward, factual articles, but, as is typical, a handful of acerbic anti-American commentaries from Slovenia's skeptical intellectual elite. A March 23 DVC featuring Director of the Office of Policy and Regional Affairs Anita Friedt was widely covered and generated positive, straightforward articles to counter negative commentaries. Post is receiving positive personal feedback from Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, who tell EmbOffs that Slovenia is currently in the thick of formulating an official policy on the topic. That said, the GOS should be expected to come out on the issue wherever European Union consensus lands. End Summary.

Media Coverage Mixed On Missile Defense

[¶](#)2. (U) Media coverage of U.S. missile defense plans has been muted over the last month, with early coverage coming in the form of straightforward reports and more recent coverage coming via commentary. Leading daily Delo carried stories headlined "Warsaw Expects Bush" indicating that President Bush was likely to travel to Poland in June to sign a final agreement on missile defense, and "Shield Turned Toward Russia" that highlighted Poland's demand for the U.S. to assess potential damage that could be caused by missiles and to help persuade Russian leadership that the missiles would not be aimed at their country. National daily Dnevnik reported "Poland Officially for Shield Negotiations" while under the headline "Kremlin Does Not Believe Pentagon," Delo reported Russian responses to the news. National papers also carried coverage of NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's statements that missile defense plans may not endanger NATO unity.

[¶](#)3. (U) Delo carried two commentaries by Damijan Slabe. One questions why Russia is not included in the shield (given that Iran is the "real threat") and saying that Russia's inclusion would "persuade Russians and several skeptical European allies that nothing is hidden behind all this." His second commentary criticizes the U.S. move as destabilizing, saying that the U.S. is annulling nuclear rules. He calls for nuclear nonproliferation agreements to be "observed - equally for all." Dnevnik carried a commentary that said the EU is now stuck in a "missile defense competition" but the

commentary offered straightforward comments from European leaders and described Russian arms sales to Iran. Dnevnik Foreign Editor Igor Mekina authored a highly critical commentary saying the missile defense program is "an aggressive weapon" and a "trap" rather than "protection," which is intended to give the U.S. an upper hand by protecting against a Russian response to a U.S. nuclear first strike.

Journalists Attend Missile Defense DVC

¶4. (U) Journalists from national television (TV Slovenia), radio (Radio Slovenia), the most widely read national print daily (Delo), and the Slovenian newswire service (STA) attended a March 23 digital video conference (DVC) hosted by Embassy Ljubljana to discuss U.S. Missile Defense plans. Ms. Anita Friedt, Director of the Office of Policy and Regional Affairs, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, responded to questions from reporters. Questions were relatively straightforward as were their subsequent reports, which were carried on radio and in the widely read weekend addition of Delo. Stories quoting Ms. Friedt reached a potential audience of roughly 1,000,000 or 50% of all Slovenes.

¶5. (U) STA wire service carried a mention of the DVC in its international policy roundup juxtaposing Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's warning about U.S. missile defense stations in Europe with comments from Ms. Friedt saying the United States is aware of Russia's second thoughts and tried to eliminate them, but that protection of the U.S. and its European allies is the objective of the missile defense program and Russia does not have a veto on this. It also carried a second, full length story headlined "United States: Russia Does Not Have a Veto on Missile Defense Stations in

Europe" that was a straightforward summary of Ms. Friedt's statements and answers from the DVC. The story highlights Friedt's comments that stations in Europe would be exclusively for defense along with comments that Moscow knows the missile defense system cannot be used against it. Newspaper Delo summarizes the DVC discussion in a story with an almost identical headline and highlights Friedt's statements denying that the proposed missile defense stations will set off a new arms race and that the U.S. is planning stations in the Caucasus. It also mentions Friedt's assurances that the stations are compatible with NATO and that any shot down missiles would be of minimal threat. Radio Slovenia included a concise story in its main evening newscast on March 23.

GOS Formulating Slovenian Position On Missile Defense

¶6. (S) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Security Policy Division Head Stanislav Vidovic told Charge d'Affaires in a March 14 meeting that he had already met with both the Czech and Polish Ambassadors to discuss U.S. missile defense plans in their countries. Vidovic said that the GOS previously considered this a strictly bilateral issue between the U.S. and these countries, and the official GOS policy was not to interfere. However, given that this is becoming a hot issue at NATO, Vidovic said that staff at the MFA would be coping with the question over the next few weeks, with hopes of formulating a basic Slovenian view. Departing from formal remarks, Vidovic commented that in his personal opinion the GOS should support the effort, saying that a safer Eastern Europe means a safer Slovenia.

¶7. (U) In an encouraging sign, Vidovic also attended the DVC on March 23 as an observer.

Comment

¶ 8. (C) Given the usual ameri-skeptic nature of the Slovenian press, coverage of U.S. missile defense plans has been relatively tame. While MFA staff are giving positive signs in their personal views on the issue, the GOS should be expected to come out on the issue wherever European Union consensus lands. Post thanks Washington for the quick response to the DVC request and is open to other potential outreach generated from Washington. Posts will continue to urge GOS officials to support Poland and the Czech Republic and to formulate policy in support of U.S. missile defense plans to further European security.

¶ 9. (U) Embassy Ljubljana point of contact for missile defense public diplomacy and policy issues is Political/Military Officer Philip Beekman, available at BeekmanPM@state.gov and 386 01 200 5676.

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